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First meeting of the Cooperation Council between the European Union and the Republic of Iraq

The Cooperation Council between the European Union (EU) and the Republic of Iraq held its first meeting in Brussels on 20 January 2014. The meeting was opened by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs, Catherine ASHTON, who headed the EU delegation. Deputy Foreign Minister of Greece, Dimitrios KOURKOULAS, was also present and chaired the remaining part of the meeting. The Iraq delegation was led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs H.E.Mr. Hoshiyar ZEBARI.

The Cooperation Council, which takes place within the framework of the EU-Iraq Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), reaffirmed the commitment of both parties to continue strengthening their relations. The meeting took stock of progress in implementation of the EU-Iraq PCA, currently under provisional application, and discussed possible areas for future cooperation. Concrete implementation of the agreement began in 2013 with the holding of three technical sub-committees: Energy and related issues; Trade and related issues; as well as Democracy and Human Rights. In the margins of the meeting, the High Representative Catherine ASHTON and Minister Hoshiyar ZEBARI held an exchange of views on a wide range of domestic and regional political issues.

Following the meeting, Catherine Ashton said: *"It was a pleasure to welcome Foreign Minister Zebari to Brussels today. The EU is doing all it can to support Prime Minister Al Maliki and his Government in their efforts to confront terrorism and address security challenges, particularly in the west of Iraq. I am very concerned about the humanitarian situation in areas affected by the recent fighting and it's vital that everything possible is done to protect the civilian population from further violence. I also mentioned the EU's concern at the execution of 40 persons yesterday, reiterating our firm position against capital punishment. Regional instability and the conflict in Syria are contributing to tensions inside Iraq, making it even more urgent to address the root causes of violence through an inclusive political process. April's general elections will be a crucial test for Iraq's democracy, and I hope that the country's political leaders will seize this opportunity to promote dialogue and compromise."*

P R E S S

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